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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAI ARMY CHIEF ON POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: BANGKOK 03916

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RALPH L. BOYCE. REASON 1.4 (B,D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Royal Thai Army Commander General Sonthi Boonyaratglin told me on July 6 that the current political situation is untenable, but the military has no intention of getting involved. Sonthi added that he has Thaksin's supporters in the military "under control." End Summary.

¶2. (C) I spoke with General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, Commander of the Royal Thai Army, at the Embassy's independence day celebration July 6. Sonthi's attendance at the event was itself notable, in contrast to his usual low profile on the social circuit. Even more significant, the General agreed to chat with me following the formalities of the receiving line, which entailed an hour wait on his behalf. Once nestled into a quiet corner, I asked for his take on the Prime Minister's controversial comments last week (ref). Sonthi was appalled by the thinly-veiled attack on Prem (himself one of Sonthi's predecessors as Army Commander). Sonthi said that the situation is untenable but he doesn't know how it can be resolved. The current crisis revolves around one man--Thaksin. The PM has the ability to end the crisis by going away, but he doesn't want to go away. I responded that our understanding is that Thaksin is resigned to not serve as PM again, but he doesn't want to announce this for tactical reasons: both to help his Thai Rak Thai party at the polls in the next election and also to keep his options open should new, unforeseen developments offer new opportunities for him. Sonthi agreed that this uncertainty is what keeps the political climate from improving. He also indicated in a variety of ways that he does not approve of the Prime Minister, particularly because Thaksin appears to be inclined to not just stay on as PM, but to attack venerable institutions respected by the military.

¶3. (C) I explained that policymakers in Washington are concerned about the situation in Thailand, but have noted that the military continues to conduct itself in a professional manner, staying on the sidelines of this crisis, and that this can largely be attributed to Sonthi himself. Sonthi stated that there is no intention, whatsoever, for military involvement in the current crisis. When asked about continued gossip that Thaksin's military supporters from pre-cadet school class 10--who now hold several important commands--may agitate to support the PM, Sonthi coolly responded, "I've got class 10 under control; they won't do anything."

¶4. (C) Comment. As the local press ratchets up new rumors of coup-plotting, it is useful to hear the Army chief state in

no uncertain terms that the military is not planning on coming off of the bench. We take him at face value; that said, one can never completely rule out the potential for military intervention in Thailand.

BOYCE